

Expressing Himself With Joy

Restaurant Review: Bâtard in TriBeCa  NYT Critics' Pick | ★★★

By PETE WELLS AUG. 26, 2014

A few minutes into my first dinner at Bâtard, it became obvious that the chef, Markus Glocker, has a sniper's accuracy at the stove. Nothing on his gracefully composed plates was chewier or crunchier or softer or saltier than it wanted to be. Mr. Glocker's kitchen chops were not exactly a surprise, given that he worked in Vienna for Heinz Reitbauer, in Chicago for [Charlie Trotter](#) and in London and New York for [Gordon Ramsay](#), none of them ever known to have smiled indulgently at a young cook and said: "Don't worry about burning those onions, kid. The customers won't notice."



Technical prowess is a fine thing for a chef to have, but it's no guarantee of memorable, expressive cooking, just as a big vocabulary doesn't necessarily mean an author will write books worth reading. In both cases, you need to have something to say.

Mr. Glocker has many things to say, and he says them clearly and with charm, as I learned over three excellent meals since [Bâtard](#) opened in May. Some dishes were so successful they seemed destined never to leave the menu. One was the springtime-sweet bowl of minted pea soup with fried sweetbreads that seemed more flavorful than anybody else's sweetbreads. Another was a kind of bouillabaisse in which rabbit (a roasted loin, a perfectly cooked kidney and saffron ravioli with a light and delicately herbed rabbit filling) splashed around in the tomato-fennel-saffron broth. A month later, both dishes had been retired, and in their place was something new and just as wonderful.



There are high spirits in Bâtard's dining room, which hums and at times roars with the sound of people having a fine night on the town. Daniel Krieger for The New York Times

A fried zucchini flower, filled with bits of poached prawns and served with lightly candied lemon zest and whole pieces of poached lobster, was a full immersion in summer, a swim in a clear pond in the pines. A slab of octopus terrine, small circles of leg pressed together with smoky pastrami spices and dabbed with

whole-grain mustard, evoked an entirely different terrain, nodding to the delicatessen, though the nuggets of braised ham hock, as rich and seductive as tuna belly, won't be found at Katz's.

The complexity of Mr. Glocker's plates never blurs the focus of his flavors. Every drop of sauce and pinch of seasoning extracts some new pleasure out of the main ingredient. There is joy in his cooking.

There are high spirits in Bâtard's dining room, too, which hums and at times roars with the sound of people having a fine night on the town. This was not frequently heard during this restaurant's [last incarnation, Corton](#). Everyone whispered as if a baby were sleeping in the next room. Even Drew Nieporent, the avuncular saloonkeeper who has held the lease on this address since he opened it as [Montrachet](#) in 1985, seemed to tread across Corton's carpet on tiptoes.

The carpet is gone. Mr. Nieporent and his partners in Bâtard, Mr. Glocker and John Winterman, last seen as maître d'hôtel at [Daniel](#), had it replaced with herringbone floorboards. The white tablecloths have been whisked away, too.

The architect [Glen Coben](#) gently raised the temperature on the interior that [Stephanie Goto](#) designed for Corton, which was elegant but aloof, more like a modern-art gallery than a restaurant. The walls that lean in and their twirling vines in bas-relief are flush with a tobacco-resin hue borrowed from Keith McNally's crayon box. Banquettes that had been covered with scallion-green fabric are now dark leather and mohair.

If the bare tables and floors weren't enough to raise the decibel level, the amount of drinking going on would. Mr. Glocker's cooking plays well with others, and his flexible à la carte menu, with a choice of two



Drew Nieporent, left, Markus Glocker, center, and John Winterman are partners at Bâtard.

Daniel Krieger for The New York Times

courses (\$55), three (\$65) or four (\$75), encourages you to get to know a bottle or two. For some drinkers, it will be impossible not to order Burgundy at a restaurant called Bâtard, and Jason Jacobeit, the head sommelier, is happy to oblige. Swimming alongside the white whales, the La Tâche and Romanée-Conti grand crus, are some lesser-known Burgundies at what are, by the region's standards at least, reasonable prices. (The list, however, needs more bottles under \$60, no matter where they come from.) Nonconformists will find blue-chip Napa Valley wines and a deep pocket of whites from Alsace, Germany and Austria, where Mr. Glocker was born.

Bâtard is hardly a cruise down the beautiful blue Danube, but the kitchen can give you an excellent Viennese dinner in the form of the Poussin schnitzel, a special in perpetuity, and the Sacher torte, a special on occasion. Both are classical, the chef's fingerprints visible only in details like the mouthwatering sea buckthorn jam and unaccountably exciting potato salad with the schnitzel. When Bâtard begins serving food at the bar, I suspect that every stool will be taken by a schnitzel-eater.

Full of ideas, Mr. Glocker comes up with the desserts, too. His caramelized milk bread with berries and brown-butter ice cream is already a certified hit, the song of the summer that radio failed to provide this year. A slice of white bread, rich like brioche, has been glazed on both sides with a shatteringly thin shell of melted sugar. It looks like the simplest thing in the world, but if it's so simple, why isn't everyone making it? Other desserts are good, but not so good that the restaurant can do without a full-time pastry chef forever. The flat-footed key lime pie should be repaired or replaced, and the poached fruit in a moat of sparkling wine was a little too Ladies Who Lunch for me.

Mr. Winterman, the general manager, has put together a lovely little cheese cart, although he hasn't figured out how to it off. "We have several goat cheeses," my server one night. "Some from France, of course. Some from Vermont." Finding this picture vague, I asked to them. This seemed catch him off "I could bring the over," he said, "but would be a little with these tables."

The cheeses are too good to be stranded on a landlocked cart. now, you have to on Mr. Winterman choose, and hope you've come on a night when he has the honey made by downtown bees who do their



Bâtard's caramelized milk bread with berries and brown-butter ice cream is already a certified hit. Daniel Krieger for The New York Times

There is another dance routine that needs practice. Maybe somebody imagined it would be fun for customers who get the vast, pink, terrific lamb chop to serve themselves lamb confit out of flame-colored Le Creuset pots. It's an awkward fishing party. The confit is some kind of new achievement in flavor and tenderness, but to get it out of the pot, you have to lift your butt off the seat.

A few cards have yet to fall into place, but Mr. Glocker and Mr. Winterman are reshuffling the deck to get a fresh combination of refined and relaxed dining, a game Mr. Nieporent has played for years. One night, Mr. Winterman showed me a cross-section of a tree trunk. (Neither he nor Mr. Nieporent pretended not to recognize me.) He thinks it would be fun to drag it out to the dining room and let customers test their skill at Hammerschlagen, a game Germans play with a hammer and nails.

If the baby isn't awake yet, that should do the trick.

Bâtard

★★★

239 West Broadway (Walker Street), TriBeCa, 212-219-2777, myriadrestaurantgroup.com/batard

ATMOSPHERE A warm and sometimes boisterous dining room with an undercurrent of elegance.

SERVICE Poised, practiced, with a mischievous twinkle in its eye.

SOUND LEVEL From lively to overexcited.

RECOMMENDED Yellowfin tuna with marinated radish and quinoa; octopus "pastrami"; black olive tortellini; veal tenderloin; chicken schnitzel; lamb for two; caramelized milk bread.

DRINKS AND WINE Cocktails are fine, but the point here is the wine, particularly but not exclusively Burgundy. After dinner, consider schnapps.

PRICES Two courses, \$55; three courses, \$65; four courses, \$75.

OPEN Tuesday to Saturday for dinner.

RESERVATIONS Accepted.

WHEELCHAIR ACCESS A portable ramp provides access to the dining room and accessible restrooms.

http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/27/dining/restaurant-review-batard-in-tribeca.html?_r=0

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